Practicing Criticism
Hyōron, *hihyō*, *kuritishizumu* and the Changing Structures of Critique in Modern and Contemporary Japan

Peter MÜHLEDER (University of Vienna/University of Tokyo) and Florian PURKARTHOFER (University of Vienna/Tokyo Metropolitan University)

Introduction

Critical writing is hard to conceptualize. It can appear in the sphere of academic discourse, in mass media, and everywhere in between. It can be objective or polemic, theoretical or pragmatic, progressive or reactionary. These ambiguities and contradictions force us to continuously question how we—as scholars of culture and society—should and can relate to this kind of discourse.

As a starting point for this issue, we do not only aim to provide an (arguably incomplete) overview of important critical writers and works in Japan, we also want to discuss critical writing as a social practice. Thus, we argue that Japanese critical thought can be better understood by taking its socioeconomic as well as historic context into consideration. This point of view provides the ability to look for the continuities and breaks in the tradition of criticism, as well as the determining social processes (e.g. within the publishing industry). In accordance, this article will not deal with subjects in a strict chronological manner, even though it is structured roughly in that way.

When conceptualizing critique as a social practice, it is useful to refer to the term's etymological roots:

> In classical Greek usage, the term critique appears mostly as an adjective (*kritikos*) and a verb (*krinein*): critical activities include distinguishing, separating, deciding, judging, incriminating - and contending. The first group of meanings has its contexts in ethics, epistemology, jurisdiction, and, lastly, in philology. The good must be distinguished from the bad, the true must be separated from the false, the innocent and the guilty must be told apart and the latter, charged and adjudged; finally, one must be able to ascertain whether a received narration is really Homeric. Criticism is the capacity to make distinctions, an activity that both distinguishes and judges. (Gürses 2006: 1)

During the Enlightenment, critique was one of the major themes in philosophy and the awakening sciences. Immanuel Kant's *Critic of Judgement*[1] (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790) is one of the most famous examples. Here we can see a kind of critique of criticism, even though it should not be mistaken for postmodern approaches like meta-criticism or a theory of criticism. In these times critique refers not only to a text or type of discourse, it was a way to cope with the changing world. It was the conscious decision to start making distinctions based on one's own experience. Not surprisingly, Greek philosophy and mathematics were rediscovered in the same time period.

Later, Karl Marx' ideas, both the outcome of Enlightenment criticism and an approach to social change, were major steps in the further redevelopment of critical thought in the intellectual sphere. The first half of the 20th century brought a vivid discussion about Marxist ideas, but also about modernity and futurism—two concepts pointing to an unaccomplished goal. Nationalism, a concept with a similar basis, highly influenced criticism and critics. The philosophers of the Frankfurt School, on the other hand, criticized the belief in a progress of rationality and science, establishing a discourse now generally referred to as 'critical theory'. Moreover, in the decades after World War II, a new left movement emerged, which was represented by new critics. In the 1960s during the student protests, French critics, artists and philosophers grew strong and post-structural and postmodern theories were an essential part of the development of criticism in the decades to come.

Michel Foucault defined critique as "the art, not to be ruled in such a way" (Foucault 1992: 12). Paraphrased by Gerald Raunig, Foucault "names critique as the attitude, the art, the will not to be governed like that, not in this way, not at this price, not by them" (Raunig 2008). In this sense criticism is far more than an aesthetic judgment or a philosophical discipline; it is an essential part of our every-day political life and a crucial factor for addressing and advancing social issues.

Contextualizing Critical Writing in Japan

Critical writings (*hihyō* or *hyōron*) in Japan are part of a 'broader market' for intellectual books generally referred to as *jinbunsho* within the Japanese publishing industry. At the center of this market are not academic publishers but commercial ones like Iwanami Shoten, Chikuma Shobō, etc. According to Hasegawa Hajime, these publishing houses can be seen as an anomaly of the Japanese publishing world. Their main feature is their 'broadness' in terms of topic range along with great variety of publication forms: they publish works in the fields of humanities as well as social sciences,

human sciences and also art; moreover dictionaries, textbooks and monographs (Hasegawa 2003: 242-243).

This specific configuration of the publishing structure leads to some unique characteristics of Japanese intellectual publishing: What is published is primarily decided by the editors of the *jinbunsho* publishing houses based on market principles. Since the published books are not aimed at a small scientific community but instead at a broader readership, they have to transcend the traditional boundaries of their specific field and produce certain "attractiveness" (ibid.: 243-246). As a result, *jinbunsho* (and therefore also criticism) has to deal with the structural characteristics of the Japanese publishing industry.

In Yoshimi Shun'ya words, the *jinbunsho* market creates a "loose discursive space," which connects intellectuals and the mass audience. It established a kind of "cultural public," supported by the commercial structures of the Japanese publishing industry (Yoshimi, quoted in ibid.: 237). This leads to a wider readership of intellectual books and criticism that transcends traditional intellectual and academic circles: "Japan's tradition of literary criticism is long indeed, and literary scholarship enjoys a much broader readership in Japan than its counterpart does in the West, despite its focus on something narrow or arcane issues in vogue among Japanese scholars" (Miller 2010: 150). As we will see, these elements continue to be a constant factor in the world of Japanese criticism today. But we also have to clarify the term 'critic' (*hyōronka*) in Japan. One of the reasons why it is difficult to operate with this term is the widespread diffusion it has undergone since its introduction in the early Meiji period. For example, the first edition of the *Gendai hyōronka jinmei jiten* (*Contemporary Critics and Commentators in Japan*, 1990, Nichigai Associates) featured 2007 names in 20 categories. In the revised edition (1995) the number of critics rose to almost three thousand. The editors' explanation for this increase was that they included not only people who were named as 'critic' (*hyōronka*) by the mass media, but also "people who engage[d] in critical activities," such as "economic commentators, international affair analysts, political journalists […]" (Nichigai Associates (eds.) 1995: 3). It seems that almost everybody who commented on current affairs was labeled (or labeled him or herself) as a 'critic'.

In contrast to this very broad conception, the term *hihyō* also carries a strong connotation toward a specific form of academic scholarship in recent time. Azuma Hiroki observed that "[s]ince the 1980s, the Japanese word *hihyō* (generally translated as criticism) refers not simply to literary criticism but has become a uniquely nuanced piece of jargon. It represents a particular style of scholarship greatly influenced over the past thirty years by new paradigms such as post-modernism, post-colonialism, and cultural studies, and it is probably closest to what "theory" refers to in English" (Azuma 2009: VVIII). In this paper we are going to take a narrower focus and confine ourselves to outstanding thinkers whose works played a crucial role in shaping the critical discourse in Japan and at the same time were able to reach a broader public. Due to the limited space our account has to remain incomplete and somewhat arbitrary, but nonetheless we hope to provide a starting point for further discussions and the necessary context for the other contributions in this publication as well as the world of Japanese criticism in general.

Critical Thought in Pre-war Japan

The term *hihyō* first appeared 1881 in Inoue Tetsujiro's *Tetsugaku jii* (*Dictionary of Philosophy*) as the translation of 'criticism'.[2] The word referred to *hyōban* (talk, rumour) within so-called *hyōbinki* (books with comments on artists and other celebrities). But three years later, in the revised edition, another meaning was added: *kanshiki* (judgment). With the expansion of the media industry in Meiji Japan (1868-1912), this second notion of the term was also equated with the term *hyōron*. At that time, Noguchi Takehiko argues, writers who participated in *hihyō* developed three characteristics: the adoption of contemporary problems, an emphasis on self-assertion, and participation in active disputes with one another (Noguchi 1991: 39-40). But even without a modern (Western) term for criticism, literary criticism has a long history reaching back to the tenth century. Many of these discourses are no longer mentioned, but critics like Motōri Norinaga (1730-1801) had great impact, and still have even on modern critics (Keene 1984: 501-502; cf. Miller 2010: 62).

Three factors served as accoucheur for modern criticism in Japan. First, it provided the chance to get in contact with "adaptions and translations of Western literature and poetry that challenged assumptions about styles and the role of literature [as well as] Western philosophy and theories […] that were reflected in both literature and translations of Western criticism" (Miller 2010: 62). This questioning of established concepts created an atmosphere of new possibilities in literature and critique. Next, newly established newspapers and journals came into being in the Meiji period, among which were literary periodicals that included prose, poetry and criticism, which emerged "from coterie magazines shared among writers" (Miller 2010: 64). They provided spaces to express the individual ideas of writers and provided the intellectual audience for disputes between critics. Finally, the changes in society and the formation of a national state encouraged the discussion of the constitution ('Freedom and People's Rights Movement,' *Jiyū minken undō*) and the unification of

written and spoken language (*genbun'ichi*). By translating Western texts into Japanese language, literates were an important group providing new input for social discussions. On the other hand, many social issues were subject matter in literary texts and criticism. As "critical commentary on society," critique was translated with the term *hihan*, rather than *hihyō*, which was strongly associated with literary critique (Abe 2006: 195).

On a practical level, the forms in which criticism was carried out—*ronsō*, *zadankai* and *zuihitsu*—stayed nearly the same after they were institutionalized in the Meiji period. The *ronsō*, a form of "literary dispute" (Keene 1984: 502), significantly shaped the landscape of criticism in Japan. It is a practice of exchanging different views or opinions through written articles in journals. The opposing statements do not have to be published in the same journal, nor is there a need to intentionally start a *ronsō*. "These *ronsō* […] were sometimes couched in easily understood, if dogmatic, terms, but at other times in complex, unidiomatic Japanese, which revealed the direct influence of the critics' readings in foreign works of literary theory. New words had to be coined to convey in Japanese the technical vocabulary of modern criticism, and these neologisms often varied from one critic to another until one gained general acceptance" (Keene 1984: 503).

But the *ronsō* does not limit itself to the discussion of literature: "*ronsō* often developed over ideological, rather than purely literary issues" (ibid.). The first *ronsō* took place in 1891- 1892 between Mori Ōgai (1862-1922) und Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859-1935). It showed that a literary issue could become the framework for a philosophical, social or political discussion. The starting point of this ronsō was the discussion of Tsubouchi Shōyō's *Shōsetsu shinzui* (*The Essence of the Novel*, 1885) and the nature of 'the novel', but as the discussion between Ōgai and Shōyō continued, it expanded beyond that: "A novel is a work of art, a variant of poetry. For this reason, the core of a novel must be human feelings and social conditions" (Shōyō, quoted in Keene 1984: 507). In this sense, literature was placed at the center of the socio-political world: "the core of modern nation state is founded more in literature than in political institutions" (Karatani 1996: 11). Language, writing, and discourse have the power to set people and events into a relationship to build something like "imagined Communities" (cf. Anderson 1993). In other words, narratives formed modern nation states because the narratives provided a base for discussion, everyone can rely on (Karatani 1996: 10).

This new kind of public discourse by two intellectuals was enabled by the growing popularity of periodical magazines at the time: literary magazines and opinion magazines (*sōgō zasshi*) became a central part of the intellectual world in modern Japan. These magazines not only accepted contributions in the form of *ronsō*, but also actively provided a platform for such discussions, and stood to benefit from these public disputes of critics. One of the most influential magazines of the mid 1880s came into existence in the sphere of a literary group called Ken'yūsha: "[in] 1885 Ozaki Kōyō and colleagues found the Ken'yūsha literary group, with its coterie magazine *Garakuta bunko*/*Library of Trash*, which grows to become Japan's first literary journal. Tsubouchi Shōyō publishes his groundbreaking critique *Shōsetsu shinzui*/ *The Essence of the Novel* as well as a fledging novel *Tōsei shosei katagi*/*The Character of Modern Students*" (Miller 2010: xxvi).

After the death of Ozaki Kōyō in 1903 his leading institution Ken'yūsha lost importance, but a new group called Bundan formed around the novelist Kikuchi Kan (1888 - 1948). Bundan controlled the literary page of the *Yomiuri Shimbun* and had veto rights over two publishing houses (Keene 1984: 547). Kikuchi Kan and Bundan were important factors of the publishing landscape of Taishō Japan (1912-1926). The power was used to promote young critics like Kobayashi Hideo (1902 - 1983) but also to work toward improvements in the lives of writers. The financial conditions for authors and critics improved greatly, and they soon were able to support themselves through their formerly uncompensated work (Masume Hakuchō 1954 quoted in Keene 1984: 547).

Kikuchi Kan also played a key role in transforming round table discussions (*zadankai*) into a distinctive intellectual practice that is still popular today:

> Kikuchi made the *zadankai*, a roundtable discussion that had hitherto served namely as a forum for serious exchanges of opinions, into the medium for dealing in an informal way with any subject likely to interest readers. This distinctively Japanese contribution to journalism was congenial both to the participants, who enjoyed talking casually with their compeers, and to readers who preferred the relaxed manner of a *zadankai* to sustained arguments. (Keene 1984: 549)

These *zadankai* also reveal the importance of university networks. Whether a critic was invited to a *zadankai* or not had a lot to do with his university affiliation (e.g., in the Taishō period there was a clear rivalry between Waseda and Tōdai) and his personal network of editors and colleagues. One example of a very active critic was Hakuchō Masume (1879 - 1962). "Hakuchō was known as a Waseda critic. This meant that he followed the traditions of Tsubouchi Shōyō and Shimamura Hōgetsu, and it also meant that he seized every opportunity to attack Tokyo University scholars" (Keene 1984: 559). As a very active critic, "[h]is comments were always of interest, though they often suggest *zuihitsu*, the miscellaneous jottings that formed a prominent part of the Japanese literary heritage. Even when his essays are brilliant, they are generally unsystematic and tend to be marred by a quirkiness that suggests Hakuchō consid-

ered himself to be a 'character' from whom unconventionality was expected" (ibid.: 561). This *zuihitsu* style was not unique to Hakuchō but builds a basic form of critical practice in Japan that is still in use today. Donald Keene formulates a harsh critique when he states the following: "Such essays [in *zuihitsu* tradition], surprisingly popular with the general public were more apt to read like homespun philosophy than criticism, but the critic in Japan has always been admired more as a purveyor of wisdom than as an analyst of literature." (ibid.: 504) In this sense, the *zuihitsu* tradition not only enables criticism to transcend a small intellectual circle (as part of the *jinbunsho* market), it can also be seen as an institutionalized practice of an observation. As the philosopher Michel Walzer puts it: "the critique of society is less a practical progeny of scientific knowledge than the erudite cousin of the common complaint" (Michel Walzer 1993, quoted in Gürses 2006:3).

We want to use the figure of Kobayashi Hideo to exemplify how political circumstances, censorship and the war had a major impact on criticism[3], and also to show continuity between the pre and post war years[4]. "[T]he world of literary criticism of the late 1920s and early 1930s [Kobayashi's first years as critic] was dominated by Marxism; about 80 percent of the criticism published in literary or general (*sōgō*) magazines was by Marxists" (Keene 1984: 579). Important figures like Miyamoto Kenji (1908-2007), maybe the "most important post-war leader of the [Japanese communist] party" (Asada in an Interview with Mulhern 2011: 280), or Nakano Shigehara (1902-1979) were active at these political times until they were arrested. Many more turned to a nationalistic or at least apolitical way of writing and "drifted within the mainstream and quite a number enthusiastically paddled with the flow toward the distant cataracts" (Cipris 2005: 1).

> Miyamoto Kenji was a leading literary critic in his youth, who won a major prize [1929] for his analysis of Akutagawa Ryunosuke's novels—relegating Kobayashi Hideo […] to second position in the competition. This was in the twenties; Kobayashi was outraged by the result. In the thirties Miyamoto was imprisoned in the remote countryside of Hokkaido, where he held out against his jailers unflinchingly. After the war this earned him such moral glory that he was all but deified within" (Asada in an Interview with Mulhern 2011: 280)

The work that won Kobayashi the second place was "Samazama naru ish¬ō¬" ("Designs of Various Kinds"), a critique of established forms of criticism, such as Marxist literary criticism (cf. Keene 1984: 586), and already showed his "lifelong aversions to abstract ideas, and conceptualizing in general" (Cipris 2005: 1). While the Marxist voices fell silent through political pressure and censorship as the years passed, Kobayashi established his "high stature as critic" during the 1930s. In November 1937 Kobayashi's essay "Sensō ni tsuite" ("On War") appeared in the opinion magazine *Kaizo*, and in it Kobayashi clearly expresses his position on the second Sino-Japanese war: "If the time comes when I have to take up the gun, I will be happy to die for the nation. I can conceive of no resolution beyond that, nor do I think one necessary. Taking up the gun as a man of letters makes no sense. All who fight, fight as soldiers" (Kobayashi 1937 cited after Cipris 2005:2). Of course such enthusiastic propaganda was not censored but appreciated by state and military officials. Not surprisingly Kobayashi was also actively participating in the "Pen Corps" (*pen butai*), a state-sponsored trip for writers to the Asian mainland in the summer of 1938. In his writings, Kobayashi expressed his admiration for Japanese soldiers, especially Hino Ashihei (1907-1960), who won the Akutagawa Prize but was now stationed in China as part of the Japanese army. During 1938 and 1944 Kobayashi visited China and Manchukuo six times and produced essays for mass circulation magazines (Cipris 2005: 3-7). In contrast to his pre-war focus on French literature and Dostoevsky, "during the war years he was attempting to discover wherein lay the uniqueness of Japanese civilization" (Keene 1984: 604). From 1944 on, he devoted his time "entirely to his studies of Mozart" (ibid.), which led to a book in 1946. "Following the end of the war, Kobayashi was sharply attacked by progressives for his collaboration with militarism, but the US occupation authorities never charged him with any offense. Having been one nationalist among many—and hardly the most extreme at that—Kobayashi incurred little censure from his compatriots, and his reputation as a brilliant critic remained largely unscathed" (Cipris 2005: 7-8). Kobayashi was not only tolerated after the war, but became successful writing best sellers and continuing what he did in the 1930s: writing about European literature and art.

Interestingly, also on a structural level continuous patterns could be found after the war, under allied occupation, where a censorship system following new rules was established (Miller 2010: 15). Especially after the beginning of the Korean War censorship got very anti communistic once again (cf. Abel 2012: 3-10). But as Jonathan Abel shows there were systematic differences in the way censorship was practiced before and after 1945:

> The prevailing history told and retold about the nature of censorship under the Occupation in Japan is that, in contrast to censorship under the imperial regime, which was generally known and understood (and was archived for the general public in the form of indexes, articles, and redaction marks), the Occupation-period censors acted under a shroud of secrecy. Typically, the two censorships are contrasted as follows: the bureaucratic imperial censorship of the prewar and wartime regime was known, explicit and direct, while that of the postwar occupation was silent, implicit, and indirect. […] Despite the desire to erase their own role, censors have continually failed to erase themselves from discourse and consequently from history (Abel 2012:2).

Critical Thought in Post-war Japan

Post-war Japan faced not only numerous socio-political, but also intellectual challenges: Japan's thinkers had to make sense of their experiences with Japanese nationalism and imperialism, the defeat in the war, and the uncertain future. In a sense, this differentiation between the intellectual elite and the mass audience reflects a continuation of pre-war structures of the intellectual field. The publisher Iwanami Shoten (est. 1923) became a symbol for the educated elite and principles of humanistic education (*kyōyōshugi*). This "Iwanami culture" created the central image of the *jinbunsho* market as it is still visible today. In post-war times, these ideas of humanistic education and the differentiation between elite/masses continued to be reproduced within Japanese higher education as well as influential opinion magazines like *Sekai* and *Chūōn kōron*. But soon, on account of the high economic growth and the appearance of the mass-consumer society, this differentiation began to soften. We intend to exemplify this change in the intellectual landscape of Japan by juxtaposing the arguably most influential thinkers of the time: Maruyama Masao (1914-1996) and Yoshimoto Takaaki (1924-2012).

Maruyama is considered "the preeminent imaginer of democracy in post-war Japan" (Barshay 1992: 366) and was also an influential figure in the student movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Central to Maruyama's thought was the idea that (modernist) social science, instead of literature, can provide Japanese citizens with the "subjectivity" they presumably lacked. Maruyama did not desire his role as enlightener, but "his class, status, and intellectual formation made it impossible to evade" (ibid.: 366). Maruyama grow up in the

> anglophile atmosphere of his family and of relatives and associates whose outlook was both journalistic and solidly nationalistic. 'Taisho democracy' was an element of personal and family experience. […] Maruyama received his higher education in the apex of the imperial system: at the First Higher School ([…] 1932-34), then as an undergraduate in the Law Faculty of Tokyo Imperial University ([…] 1934-36), and finally as a graduate assistant (*joshu*; 1937-40), assistant professor (1940-50), and professor (1950-71) in that faculty. In general, graduates and young faculty members of the imperial university were guaranteed high social status, relative physical safety, and protection, though not immunity, from ideological persecution. They enjoyed presumptive social approbation and assumed the right, if they desired, to fill positions of national intellectual leadership. As public men, they were to be teachers of the nation. (ibid.: 378)

The cornerstone of Maruyama's intellectual reputation was the publication of the article "Chōkokka shugi no ronri to shinri" ("The Logic and Psychology of Ultranationalism," 1946) in the opinion magazine *Sekai*. But, as Takeuchi Yō argues, due to his positioning within the intellectual field of Japan, Maruyama was mostly noticed by a small circle of intellectuals[5] but had not gained a public profile within the broader intellectual market (Takeuchi 2005: 170-172). He continued this practice throughout his career:

> For the most part, he addressed his educated audience through media of limited reach: university and public lectures, appearances before local and church organizers, publication in opinion journals [*sōgō zasshi*] rather than mass-circulation dailies […]. Maryuyama's professional identity remained closely tied to the University of Tokyo, where he held the chair in East Asian political thought until his retirement in 1971. (Barshay 1992: 391)

While Maruyama followed the path of Japanese elite education which made him predestined for taking up a central intellectual position, Yoshimoto's background is quite different: Born as the son of a shipwright his family "were poor outsiders and regarded as such" (Olson 1978: 330). He graduated from an industrial higher school in Yamagata, but returned to Tokyo to enroll in the Tokyo Engineering University. After the war he worked in a number of different companies, and started to write poetry, but in the early 1950s, he primarily moved to writing critical essays and articles (ibid.: 331). His major critical works can be divided into two stages:

> The first is his study of Japanese political converts […], as well as his study of the responsibility for the war, and his criticism of post-war Japanese literature. The second phase […] includes Yoshimoto's criticism of the basis of universality of thought, wherein he presents his own foundation for universality contrasted with the pragmatism of post-war (Japanese) democracy and Marxian scientific objectivism […]. (Murakami 2005:95)

He gained a reputation as a "polemicist" among younger professors and students, especially during the time of the student-movement in the 1960s (Olson 1978: 328). He was not only a combative writer, but also an extreme productive one. He gives the impression of a "machine, which engulfs an enormous amount of texts in order to produce comments"[6] (Ophüls-Kashima 1998: 248) and a lack of expertise in many fields never stopped him (Olson 1978: 356).

The difference in the social positioning of Yoshimoto and Maruyama also becomes apparent in their critical practice and their relation to the intellectual elite of Japan. Maruyama, through his background and status, clearly evokes an air of elitism: "We have all met men in barbers` shops, bath houses, and railway carriages who treat those around them to their lofty opinions on inflation or the American-Soviet question. These men are what I call the pseudo-intelligentsia, and on asking them their occupation, we find that they mostly belong to […] the middle stratum" (Maruyama Masao, quoted in Barshay 1992: 390).

But for Yoshimoto, this relationship was much more ambiguous. He criticized Maruyama and other intellectuals for not taking "the people" into account, rather seeing them as "puppets" which act out abstract ideas or ideologies (Barshay 1992: 388). Through Yoshimoto's emotive language, his use of the term "people" was often regarded as a metaphor for solidarity. His "stance takes the form of a defense of the 'masses' (*taishū*) against the

criticism of intellectuals, including a positive re-evaluation of the 'private self-interest'" (Cassegard 1998: 11) and further "champions the 'autonomy' of the 'masses', meaning their ability to lead a life without interference or directives from elitist intellectuals or other authorities" (ibid.: 20). But, at the same time, Yoshimoto, as an intellectual, had to "keep them at arm's length" (Olson 1978: 329). In other words, "he needed the idea of 'the people' as a kind of anti-elite to reify his own elitist existence" (ibid.: 354). In that regard it is not really surprising that many of his texts were written in a "dense style and in a jargon which appears to target primarily intellectuals" (Cassegard 1998: 25).

What Yoshimoto anticipated, and what became apparent later in the 1970s, was that the "shared space" between authors, readers and publishers began to disappear. The new educated "elite" of the post-war mass universities—the *sararīman*—did not continue the reading practices of the old educated elite but rather, on their long train rides to work - embraced the new mass market, popular novels and comics. Japanese society imagined itself as a middle-class society, creating a new consumer market and thus destroying the "shared space" of the *jinbunsho* market, which was based on the social distinction between an educated elite and the market of the masses (Hasegawa: 267-271).

The Postmodern Turn

A big change in the critical landscape of Japan can be seen in the late 1970s and early 1980s with the introduction of French postmodern thought. During that time Japan itself made the transition from an industrial state to a post-industrial consumer society. This is accompanied by the growing importance of Japan's cultural industry. The argument that the cultural industry plays a crucial role in post-industrial societies (cf. Virno 2004:5 8; Jameson 1998: 44-47) might be especially true in the case of Japan due to the expanding of mass media and advertisement culture into a new consumer culture (with a diversified set of subcultures).

At the same time, as the shared space of the *jinbunsho* market with its focus on humanistic education collapsed, the Japanese book market in general experienced an ongoing crisis that has continued since the 1980s. The reasons for this crisis are primarily structural. First, there exists a highly opaque web of debts and liabilities between publishers, wholesalers and bookstores. In addition, the status of print media as 'goods of consignment' leads to a constant return flow of unsold books to the publishers. As a result the only way for a publishing house to stay profitable is to publish more new books than it receives in returns. Therefore, in times of declining book sales (which has been the case since the 1980s) the number of newly published titles has constantly increased.[7] And finally, the explosion of the number of book shops during the consumer boom in the 1980s made it more difficult to make a profit with books, which led the bookstores—and publishers—to focus more and more on publications with a high turn-over rate such as magazines and pop-culture products (like *manga*). For *jinbunsho* publishers this was a huge problem since new publications received less and less shelf-time and *jinbunsho* books usually only turn a profit if they sell out their first printing and become reprinted (ibid.: 253-254).

In this context, postmodern French theory offered academics and critics a way not only to make sense of this new reality, but turned out to be perfectly adaptable to this new media environment: The booming magazine business of the 1970s and 1980s helped to popularize postmodern theory in Japan. But rather than the big, traditional general-interest magazines like *Sekai* or *Chūō kōron*, new and smaller magazines played a central role. An important figure in this process was the editor Miura Masashi. He became the chief editor of the journal *Gendai shisō* (*Contemporary Thought*) in the mid-1970s and immediately created a special issue on contemporary French philosophy. Furthermore, he also gave young Japanese academics the opportunity to publish in his magazine. At the same time, other intellectual/critical magazines like *Paidia* and *Episutēmē* appeared at the market. Together, they dealt not only with postmodern French philosophy, but also used hip and flashy designs to cater to a new generation of readers.

The popularization of postmodern theory can further also be attributed to two scholars: Hasumi Shigehiko (b. 1936) and Karatani Kōjin (b. 1941). Hasumi had studied French literature at University of Tokyo, but in the 1960s he started to write about movies and Japanese literature as well (Sasaki 2009: 106). In his first published book, *Hihyō aruiwa kasha no saiten* (*Critique or the Festival of Suspended Animation*, 1974), he discussed French thinkers like Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Giles Deleuze as well as contemporary French avant-garde literature movements. In 1978 he went on to publish an introduction to the main protagonists of contemporary French philosophy: *Fūkō—Durūzu—Derida* (*Foucault—Deleuze—Derrida*).

Karatani studied economics and English literature at the University of Tokyo and later he became a visiting researcher at Yale University, where he became acquainted with the leading figures of the deconstructivism like Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida. He soon began to expand the scope of his writings beyond literary criticism starting with a work on Marx in *Marukusu sonso kanōsei no chūshin* (1978). Two years later he published his arguably most famous work *Nihon kindai bungaku no kigen* (*Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, 1980), a deconstruction of the concept of "modern literature" in Japan (and a deconstruction of the concept of "Japan" as well).

These publications led to a 'boom' of postmodern theory within the intellectual field during the early 1980s. Most famous example for this boom is Asada Akira (b. 1957), at the time a young university assistant at the University of Kyoto. In 1983 he published his first book titled *Kōzō to chikara* (*Structure and Power*), a collection of essays previously published mostly in *Gendai shisō* dealing with different aspects of poststructuralist theory. The book became a nationwide bestseller. Marilyn Ivy (1989) argued that everyone bought the book—office workers, university students, artists and musicians—but hardly anyone read it (Ivy 1989:26-27). The media soon coined the term "new academism" (*nyū akademizumu*), other authors and publishers joined the hype, and their postmodern discourse became part of the cultural industry of the 1980s (ibid.: 26).

In other words, intellectuals like Asada Akira managed to transform cultural theory into a best-selling commodity. With their work they established strong connections between postmodern theory and other contemporary forms of popular culture like advertisement-culture and, as a result, produced works that were perfectly adapted to the new market conditions. For a short moment they captured the imagination of a young generation who were considered the main protagonists of a new consumerist 'information society'. They aimed for providing a new kind of knowledge for the new socio-economic configurations of a specific time and managed to establish a (sellable) new kind of cultural criticism in Japan. But one has to ask the questions that Jameson was formulating in regard to postmodernism in general:

> There is some agreement that the older modernism functioned against its society in ways which are variously described as critical, negative, contestatory, subversive, oppositional and the like. Can anything of the sort be affirmed about postmodernism and its social moment? We have seen that there is a way in which postmodernism replicates or reproduces – reinforces – the logic of consumer capitalism; the more significant question is whether there is also a way in which it resists that logic. (Jameson 1998: 20)

Beyond Postmodernism

With the end of the postmodernism boom and the burst of the bubble in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Japan entered a new era. This feeling of the "end of history"/"beginning of a new history" was further intensified by the death of the Shōwa Tennō, as well as geopolitical developments, especially the collapse of the Cold War world order and the start of the first Gulf War (Sasaki 2009: 167-170). In addition, the socio-economic base of Japan started to undergo significant changes during that time:

> [In the past,] Japan was equipped with a unique institutional mechanism: corporations substituted public welfare (company-centrism) and bureaucrats conducted redistribution through land development (developmentalism). Then, from the 1990s, globalization and neoliberal policies fundamentally destroyed those systems. […] The government abandoned its role of improving the industrial and economic conditions of surrounding areas through offering public work projects. Rather than improvements these developments instead generated a large number of unemployed workers and a large number of the working poor […]. (Suzuki 2010: 536)

Karatani's activities in the early 1990s provide a good example of the changes in the critical landscape: As a response to Japan`s involvement with the Gulf War[8], Karatani (together with a group of contemporary writers) made a public plea against the war and for preserving Japan`s peace constitution. For Karatani, this was the first direct confrontation with actual political developments since the 1960s (Sasaki 2009: 171-172). While some see his newfound political activism as "naïve" and a "simple performance based on common sense" (ibid.: 172), it provides a clear contrast to postmodern rhetoric of the earlier decade, which can be regarded as apathetic to the politics of the day or even be seen as ideologically complicit with (or as being exploited by) the conservative/neoliberal political climate of the time:

> Politically, the ruling party LDP was preparing itself in order to defend against the leftist movement. […] Their method was to make use of the intellectuals. […] An advisory committee was formed to make use of intellectual discourses systematically. From this committee, public opinions were formulated and discussions were made as if people all agreed. A consequence was the diminishing of the public sphere. Economically, they adopted neoliberalism as their ideology and, philosophically, postmodernism. Postmodernism was often referred to in the context of leftists, but there was a way for the rightists to adopt it. Phrases such as 'flexibility' or 'change of subject' were often mentioned by the committee members or the intellectuals around it. (Ikegami 2001: 369-370)

Furthermore, the main stage of the critical discourse shifted once more from criticism magazines like *Gendai shisō* or *Hihyō kūkan* to general-interest or opinion magazines like *Chūō kōron* or *Gendai* (Sasaki 2009: 181), indicating a break with the postmodern discourse of the 1980s. As a result, the discourse of the 1990s became more critical of the postmodern rhetoric and focused more on the actual social reality (ibid.: 178).

A key player in this new discourse is Fukuda Kazuya (b. 1960). Fukuda is a graduate of the French literature department at Keio University and started to publish in literary magazines in the late 1980s. During the 1990s he issued an enormous number of texts on topics such as literature, modern and contemporary history, and current political affairs, not only in critical and literary magazines but also in weekly papers, subculture magazines, and daily newspapers. A clear example of his stance toward the discourse of the 1980s provides his polemic comment for the paperback edition of Asada's interview series *"Rekishi no owari" o koete* (*Beyond "The End of History", Chūō Kōron*, 1999), where he describes—written in form of a fictional dialog taking place in a publishing house—the *nyū akademizumu* boom as follows: "Thought (*shisō*) or philosophy (*tetsugaku*), as

it is practiced in Japan has no connection to the life and death of the people. It became nothing more than toys (*omocha*) or accessories (*akusesarī*). And I think it was Asada who completed this toy-ification (*ganguka*) of thought"[9] (Fukuda 1999: 322). Asada's *nyū akademizumu* was reduced to nothing more than a consumer boom: "Because I wanted to become Bruce Lee I bought nunchucks, swung them around and hit my head. And then I read *Kōzō to chikara* to become a 'schizo kid'[10]. Same difference"[11] (ibid.: 321). But, "at least you could hurt yourself with the nunchucks, so they were more real"[12] (ibid.: 323). Unlike Asada, Fukuda did not gain popularity through a single work, but through producing an enormous amount of texts in many different genres and publications, something he has in common with Miyadai Shinji (b. 1959), who also became a central figure in the popular critical discourse of the 1990s (Sasaki 2009: 180).

Miyadai studied sociology at the University of Tokyo. In the late 1980s he was working on a translation of George Spencer-Brown`s *Laws of Form* (1969). Furthermore, he became influenced by the American sociologist Talcott Parsons and the German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (ibid.: 209) and as a result began analyzing social phenomena from the perspective of social system theory. His probably most famous work *Seifuku shōjotachi no sentaku* (*The Choices of the Girls in Uniform*, Kōdansha, 1994) deals with the phenomenon of "compensated dating" (*enjō kōsai*) and brought nationwide media attention to the practice of older men buying the companionship (sexual and/or nonsexual) of attractive and often school-aged girls. Also, his notion of Japan as a "universe of parallel islands" (*yokonarabi no shima uchū*) referring to a differentiation of Japanese society into subcultural communities became influential for future critical writing in Japan[13].

Otaku Criticism

Another major development in Japanese critical writing during the 1990s was the opening toward subcultures, especially *otaku* culture. Not only did critics discover the various subcultures as topics for their writings, but also did '*otaku* as critics' like Ōtsuka Eiji (b. 1958) and Azuma Hiroki (b. 1971) themselves become important figures.

Ōtsuka studied ethnology at Tsukuba University and in the 1980s he worked as an editor for subculture magazines. He was as editor of the magazine *Manga burikko*, in which Nakamori Akio introduces the term *otaku* as a signifier for *anime/manga* fans. In the late 1980s Ōtsuka developed this theory of narrative consumption (*monogatari shōhi*), in which he describes a new form of consumer behavior in late modern Japan: the consumption of "small narratives" (*chiisa na monogatari*) through commodities, in order to master an underlying "grand narrative" (*ōki na monogatari*). In contrast to the 1980s 'new academism', his theory is based on empirical observations (ethnographic fieldwork) rather than (often Western) theoretical works.

Ōtsuka's theory of narrative consumption became the foundation for the upcoming critics of and within the *otaku* world, one of whom was Azuma. Other than Ōtsuka Azuma can also be regarded as a direct descendent of the *nyū akademizumu* boom. His first published work appeared in the journal *Hiyhō kūkan* (*Critical Space*), one of the most influential intellectual journals in the 1990s, edited by Asada and Karatani and his first book on Jacques Derrida (1998) was also previously published as a series of articles in this same journal. At the time, Asada described Azuma as follows:

> The encounter with Hiroki Azuma [sic] was a fresh surprise. Of course, the 'postmodern intellectuals' of my generation have shown interest in subculture, but it was often just a gesture to break down the barriers between high culture and subculture. But here is a bona fide 'otaku' - he, in his mid-twenties, still has anime posters in his room and grows a beard imitating an anime director - who is born into thorough cultural poverty after high culture has been completely devastated but nonetheless struggles tenaciously with the French texts (though he cannot speak French himself) and writes papers that make readers think seriously. (quoted in Abel/ Kono 2009: XXII)

Azuma's big success, the book that made him famous in and outside of Japan was *Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan* (2001). Azuma himself described the role his book was playing within Japanese criticism as follows:

> [*Dōbutsuka suru postumodan*] was not originally published as "criticism" because at that time Japanese "criticism" was at a major turning point. Postmodernism was introduced to Japan in earnest in the 1980s. Karatani and Asada represented the movement and exerted great influence until the early 1990s. By the late 1990s, their role declined rapidly, and, dragged down by this decline, works of "criticism" and "theory" in general began to lose readership. In face of such a crisis, I wrote this book in order to resuscitate "criticism" and "theory" by treating a complete different subject matter, aiming at a completely different readership from what postmodernists of the past generation had assumed. In Japanese criticism, Ōtsuka Eiji and Miyadai Shinji had been virtually neglected until the publication of this book. Therefore, by discussing the otaku using postmodernist theories and by mentioning Ōtsuka and Miyadai while neglecting Karatani, my account of affairs in this book contained strategic reversals of values that were considered bold at the time. (Azuma 2009: VIII-IX)

In other words, Azuma (and other critics) established a narrative of a critical tradition since the 1980s that links the idea of criticism to the Western (especially American) conception of (cultural) 'theory'. Therefore, the critical value of Azuma's book was seen in its internal qualities as a theoretical "intervention" (Abel/Kono 2009: XX), as something that was able to overcome the "crisis" of postmodernism within Japanese critical writing. In a similar way, most writings on Japanese critical/intellectual discourse were formulated from such an 'inside perspective'. This also shows how much of the

idea of criticism was 'colonized' by the image of a genre of 'postmodern cultural criticism' (and the attempts to overcome it). *Hihyō* finally became its own fixed genre inside the *jinbunsho* market.

Criticism as Spectacle in Contemporary Japan

While self-assertion was part of *hihyō* from the beginning, it was in the 1980s when the performative aspects of critical practice took the central stage. The literary scholars Abel and Kono (2009: XXI) state: "This personality-driven discursive culture has historical roots in the culture of the literati or *bundan* since the Meiji period, but in the 1980s it entered into another phase with the highly sophisticated consumer culture of the post-high-growth Japan in the background." It seems that in the same time as the traditional *jinbunsho* market faced its crisis, the world of Japanese criticism underwent an approximation with the cultural industry (and its newly established 'idol system').

This particular articulation of the traditional intellectual field and mass-market consumer culture continued to be a central aspect of Japanese critical writing ever since. Azuma's "Zero-aka Dōjō"[14], a project he created together with Kōdansha Box (a publishing line from Kōdansha focusing on pop- and subculture entertainment) in 2008 provides a perfect example. The project is strikingly similar to television casting shows: aspiring critics act as candidates who have to accomplish a series of tasks while being judged and finally filtered out by a panel of established critics, editors and other more-or-less famous personalities. Finally, only one can overcome the sixth and final 'barrier' (*kanmon*) and receive the prize: a publishing contract with Kōdansha Box for his or her first publication with a guaranteed first edition of 10.000 books.

Taking a closer look at the 'barriers', we can see an interesting picture on the sets of skills that were expected from 'Japan's next top-critic'. One task tested the candidates' ability to quickly produce texts for mass media distribution (being able to write a photo-essay on Tokyo for the Kōdansha Box publication *Pandora* within a day). Other tasks focused on the candidates' capacity for self-marketing: (being able to sell 500 copies of a self-produced, self-published critical work (*hihyō dōjinshi*) at the *bungaku furima*[15] in Akihabara) and selling pitches for book projects (being able to present a book idea in seven minutes and even come up with a catchphrase). All events (along with the profiles of the candidates) were published on the event's website or were aired on the online video platform Niko Niko Dōga. In this project, every aspect of critical practice finally became commodified and wholly assimilated into the form of Japanese popular culture production. Since then, Azuma Hiroki completely broke away from academism and set up his own production company, Genron.

Conclusion

In this paper we argue that Japanese critical thought can be understood better by taking its socioeconomic as well as historical context into consideration: Japanese criticism is situated in a system around the book market based on Japan's modern intellectual elitism, and therefore the *jinbunsho* publishing industries play a major role in determining whose voices are heard or not. But with the traditional publishing system in an ongoing crisis, the rapid development of digital media (and new forms of publishing and promotions) also allows ways of critical thought to emerge outside this traditional system. Future research has to show the possibilities and shortcomings of projects like Azuma's Genron, and the possibility of producing critical writing in a highly media saturated environment like Japan.

While the English and German discourse is searching vividly for a theory of criticism, there is less concern about the actual practices of criticism (cf. Demirović 2008). But looking at Japanese criticism from this point of view, we can observe that three practices became institutionalized: *ronsō*, a critical discussion of two or more critics published in periodicals; *zadankai*, transcriptions of roundtable discussions, normally in easily understandable language; and *zuihitsu* essays, critique formulated in a literary style.

Alex Demirović (2008: 1) summed up an argument by Foucault by saying: "Critique has lost its foundation, because it was linked in a certain way with history—which raises the question of what critique is." In this paper, we attempted to explore these links of Japanese criticism through a historic perspective. While it created its own practices and traditions, it was always part of a broader social-cultural context. Be it the establishment of the Western concepts of criticism in Meiji and Taishō Japan, or the postmodern turn in the 1980s: these drastic shifts had a deep impact on publishing structures as well as literary style and content of *hyōron*.

But has Japanese criticism "lost its foundation"? In Japan, critical writing has the chance to be read by a broad audience, but in return it also has to operate within the structures of the Japanese post-modern consumer culture. In such an environment, critical discourse might easily succumb to spectacle and entertainment. The lines are blurred, and therefore it is even more important to examine carefully the critical discourse as well as the underlying socio-economic structures. If we do so, the critical perspectives on Japan presented in this paper, may help or even challenge our own ideas and views on Japanese society and beyond.

Endnotes

1. In the most common English translation by James Creed Meredith (1952), the book is titled *Critique of Judgement*. But Paul Guyer's 2000 translation, part of the new Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant in Translation, uses the title *Critique of the Power of Judgement*.
2. There are basically four terms with the meaning critic or criticism in Japanese: hihyō, hihan, hyōron and the English loanword kuritishizumu (criticism). Even though they could be used as synonyms, they formed different connotations and distinct practices of usage became established. (cf. Abe 2006:195;
3. Though we demonstrated above how criticism was practiced in early modern Japan, and which authors were at the controls of the literary pages and magazines, it is important to mention that censorship could also be seen as a practice to control, constrain and suppress criticism. There is a long history of censorship before the Meiji era, but we refrain from dealing with it in this article.
4. The Meiji government enacted the first publishing regulations in 1869, and in 1875 similar regulations for newspapers followed (Miller 2010: 15). The Meiji Constitution intensified these laws and by the 1920s, when Marxist thought and communist ideas were on the rise, the Peace Preservation Act of 1925 carried censorship to the extreme.
5. Takeuchi identifies this as the "cultural area" around University of Tokyo.
6. Our translation.
7. In recent years, though, a reversion of this tendency can be observed (cf. Hoshino 2011).
8. Although Japan could not send troops due to Article 9 of its constitution, it provided financial support.
9. Our translation.
10. A term popularized by Asada Akira in his second book Tōsōron. Sukizu kizzu no bōken (On Flight. The Adventures of the Schizo Kids, 1984) referring to people who managed to master Japan's postmodern condition.
11. Our translation.
12. Our translation.
13. See also the contributions of Steffi Richter and Martin Roth/ Fabian Schäfer in this issue.
14. The website of the project can be found here: http://bookclub.kodansha.co.jp/kodansha-box/zeroaka.html (last accessed 11.08.2013).
15. A book fair focused on subculture/criticism founded by Ōtsuka Eiji.

References

Abe Kiyoshi (2006): "Critique", Theory, Culture & Society 23, 195-197.

Abel, Jonathan E. (2012): Redacted: The Archives of Censorship in Transwar Japan. Berkeley, Calif. [u.a.]: Univ. of California Press. (=Asia Pacific Modern 11).

Abel, Jonathan and Shion Kono (2009): "'Translators' Introduction", Azuma Hiroki: Otaku. Japan's Database Animals. Minneapolis und London: University of Minnesota Press, XV-XXIX.

Anderson, Benedict (1993): Die Erfindung der Nation. Frankfurt am Main.

Azuma, Hiroki (2009): Otaku: Japan's Database Animals. Minneapolis und London: University of Minnesota Press.

Barshay, Andrew E. (1992): "Imagining Democracy in Postwar Japan: Reflections on Maruyama Masao and Modernism", Journal of Japanese Studies, Vol. 18, No. 2, 365-406.

Cassegard, Carl (2008): "From Withdrawal to Resistance. The Rhetoric of Exit in Yoshimoto Takaaki and Karatani Kojin", The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus. (URL http://www.japanfocus.org/-Carl-Cassegard/2684).

Cipris, Zeljko (2005): "Responsibility of Intellectuals: Kobayashi Hideo on Japan at War", The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus. (URL http://www.japanfocus.org/-Zeljko-Cipris/1625).

Demirović, Alex (2008): "Critique and Truth. For a New Mode of Critique", transversal / EIPCP 2008/04.

Fukuda Kazuya (1999): "Batsu atari paradaisu", Asada Akira: `Rekishi no owari` o koete. Tōkyō: Chūō Bunko, 320-325.

Gürses, Hakan (2006): "On the Topography of Critique", transversal / EIPCP 2006/06.

Hasekawa Hajime (2003): Shuppan to chi no media-ron. Tōkyō: Misuzu Shobō.

Hoshino Wataru (2011): "Shoseki rūtū no henka wa nani o kataru ka", Daigaku shuppan, Vol. 80, 9-12.

Ikegami, Yoshihiko (2001): "Gendai-Shiso: Making Use of Postmodernism", Inter-Asia Cultural Studies, 2/3, 369-371.

Ivy, Marilyn (1989): "Critical Texts, Mass Artifacts: The Consumption of Knowledge in Postmodern Japan", Harry Harootunian and Masao Miyoshi (eds.): Postmodernism and Japan. Durham: Duke University Press, 419-444.

Jameson, Fredric (1998): The Cultural Turn. Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1982-1998. London and New York: Verso.

Kōjin, Karatani (1991): "The Discursive Space of Modern Japan", Boundary 2, 18/3, 191-219.

——— (1996): Die Ursprünge der modernen japanischen Literatur. Basel: Stroemfeld.

Keene, Donald (1984): Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era. Vol. 2: Poetry, Drama, Criticism. New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Miller, J. Scott (2010): The A to Z of Modern Japanese Literature and Theatre. Lanham, Md. [u.a.]: Scarecrow. (= Historical dictionaries of literature and the arts; 33)(= A to Z guides; 187).

Mulhern, Francis (ed.) (2011): Lives on the Left: A Group Portrait. London and New York: Verso.

Murakami, Fuminobu (2005): Postmodern, Feminist and Postcolonial Currents in Contemporary Japanese Culture. London and New York: Routledge.

Nichigai Associates (eds.) (1995): Gendai hyōronka jinmei jiten. Tōkyō: Nichigai Associates.

Noguchi Takehiko (1991): "Hanmon, hōyō soshite hiai - Kindai nihon no 'hihyō' no hakken", in: Hihyō kūkan 3, 39-51.

Olson, Lawrence (1974): "Intellectuals and 'The People'; on Yoshimoto Takaaki", Journal of Japanese Studies 4/2, 327-357.

Ophüls-Kashima, Rainold (1998): Yoshimoto Takaaki – ein Kritiker zwischen Dialektik und Differenz. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Raunig, Gerald (2008): "What is Critique? Suspension and Recomposition in Textual and Social Machines", transversal / EIPCP 2008/08.

Sasaki Atsushi (2009), Nippon no Shisō. Tōkyō: Kōdansha.

Suzuki, Munenori et al. (2010): "Individualizing Japan: Searching for its Origin in First Modernity", The British Journal of Sociology 61/3, 514-538.

Takeuchi Yō (2005): Maruyama Masao no jidai. Daigaku—chishikijin—jānarizumu. Tōkyō: Chūō Kōron.

Virno, Paolo (2004): A Grammar of Multitude. New York: Semiotext(s).